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EARTH MOODS



HERVEY ALLEN



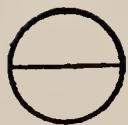
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*EARTH MOODS
AND OTHER POEMS*

Books by Hervey Allen

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EARTH MOODS AND OTHER POEMS

BY
HERVEY ALLEN



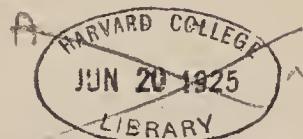
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AND OTHER POEMS**

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First Edition

C-Z

JOHN WHITE ALEXANDER

*To you who have passed from it, leaving it more
beautiful, I dedicate this vision of the Earth.*

169614

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PREFACE

In this collection of poems, the first section, "Earth Moods," is for the most part an attempt to phrase poetically some of the modern conceptions of life,—to identify the eternal emotions of poetry with the thought peculiar to the place and age in which it is written. As the nature of the subject matter has seemed to require in some cases an almost epic treatment, a few words of explanation as to the themes of the poems may aid the reader to a more immediate approach.

The "Northern Earth Mood" is an epic of man in the northern hemisphere from the last ice age to the voyage of Columbus. It is presented from an astronomical perspective with the element of time greatly accentuated. "Funeral at High Tide" is an expression of human despair before the inscrutable cosmic forces phrased in terms of landscape. "Children of Earth," in somewhat the same mood, is a study of the effect of sun, landscape, and climate upon certain highly contrasted American types. "The Nest of Mist" presents the effects of the mystical aspects of the Earth upon thought in a natural environment and the result of the lack of such mystery in cities. The "Fire Thief" deals with the Promethean legend, and in contrast to the other "Earth Moods," retains some classic conceptions of earth and sky.

Under "Other Poems" have been included a number of things, lyrical, mystical, narrative, and grotesque, grouped somewhat according to theme.

HERVEY ALLEN.

Pelham, New York,
July 1924

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"Indeed it is a question if the exclusive reign of this orthodox beauty is not approaching its last quarter. The new Vale of Tempe may be a gaunt waste in Thule; human souls may find themselves in closer harmony with external things wearing a somberness distasteful to our race when it was young. The time seems near, if it has not actually arrived, when the chastened sublimity of a moor, a sea, or a mountain will be all of nature that is absolutely in keeping with the moods of the more thinking among mankind."

—Thomas Hardy.

EARTH MOODS

NORTHERN EARTH MOOD

I Saga of the North

II Saga of Leif the Lucky

NORTHERN EARTH MOOD

I

SAGA OF THE NORTH

In the Beginning

Vision the sun and stars,
The gold-faced central sun,
Wandering like glittering Apollo
With the planet muses
Across the star-enamelled fields of space.
Spy out the tilting ice-tipped Earth,
Curving through nothingness,
Dogged by her blue void-shadow.
Look from the eyes in the astonished mask
Of the beardless and purse-mouthed moon
At the merging and melting of moods
On the face of the northern hemisphere.

*THE HAND IS IN THE GLOVE,
WHICH IS CLASPED BY SUNS
AND BUTTONED BY THE EARTH,
YET THE WRINKLING OF MATTER
SHOWS THE WORKING OF FINGERS*

Geological

Shades of the seasons pass across the face of continents
Like cloud shadows over dun woodlands;
The Earth rocks with eleven-fold motion;
Storms gather; arrow-headed flocks of birds shoot
from continent to continent;
The sea leaps over the dim shoal of Atlantis
Dark as an evil memory in the azure brain of ocean.
Twinkling beneath the chromatic kaleidoscope of sun,
star, and moonlight,
In rays splashed from behind the plains of Nowhere,
The saw-toothed, ice-pinnacled arc of Earth
Sweeps titanically into the northern horizon.
Now the blueness of a six-months night
Occults its glittering bow, and now—
The snowfields glare a half-year day,
While as the sphere spins, murmurous with storms
And the complaining voice of islands
Chafed by ice-scummed seas,
The circle of the boreal aurora flickers into heaven,
Shaking its blue corona like the light from steel swords
Threatening the fixed stars and the planets.

*PRESSED INTO THE BLUE SLATE
IS THE FIVE-TOED SIGIL OF A SMALL DRAGON.
IN THE MIDDLE OF YOUR BRAIN LIES HIS THIRD EYE.*

Prehistoric

Come closer, Watcher in the High-skies,
That you may behold the expressions of time
Upon the face of the planet.
That faint trumpeting, which dies away
Like the lowing of monstrous star-cattle,
Marks the passing of the mastodon.
Now, the ice-fields melting northward,
Grass creeps upward like a green flame
Following the steaming moraine of the glacier.
Bison sweep across the tundras
Like patches of brown wingless flies.
Among the hills, from silver breasts of lakes,
Come glittering, one by one, small iridescent pin-
points
Like red rat-eyes in the darkness,
Until the wide blue plains of the planet
Light up in mockery of the galaxy
With constellated tribal camp-fires of men.
Portentous secrets down there:
Sketching on the damp walls of caverns,
Patiently in a splash of lamplight,
Longheads trace the red-legged bison
Upon the walls of hill-caves.
Hands, no longer fumbling, carve the deer horns.

Flint flakes grow smoother and keener.
Crooked sticks disturb the Earth.
Dolmens point the sun path, —
And man tells stories about the sky-people.

*GRAVEN UPON THE HORN OF AN EXTINCT DEER
STANDS A MAMMOTH WITH CURLY TUSKS
AND A DOT FOR AN EYE.
HIS ETCHED HAIR DROOPS DISCONSOLATELY.*

Lyric Interlude Astronomical

Spin, Top of the Ages, spin!
Sun-gilt upon your western and oriental rim;
Peer from your red-gold frame of dawn and sunset
With your gracious face of hooded-waters.
Gaze longingly upon the moon,
Like lover at the dead face of his darling.
Has not the moon died for desire of you,
Pursing cold lips up through the ages
For the kiss withheld by space?
Ah! What a heat if you could come together!
Circle, Moon, weave your deadly ovals
Till your tidal spell has drawn the Earth to sleep
And her still face will gaze across at yours.
But meantime, Earth, down whirling ages
Cast your cloak of shadow on your silent lover
While you spin, Planet, spin!

Bronze Into Iron

Winds weather down the granite mountains,
Nile abandons his terraces,
Zinc has married tin and copper in the glazing fire ;
While gnome-like black folk seek the hill-hid caves,
And red-haired warriors, glistening blue with woad,
Dash through oak forests in small bell-hung chariots.
Altar-fires twinkle at Stonehenge ;
Men burn in wicker cages at Mona ;
Odin's ravens commence to spy out the Earth.
Southward, pride solidifies in pyramids
Over the selfish sleep of Theban kings ;
While Memnon wearies,
Singing of the mornings—mornings—mornings
Ever streaming from the east,
Like rows of shuttles dragging wefts of day
Across the sombre warp of purple nights ;
Weaving the patient pattern of the years
And new things on sustaining webs of old,
The while the Star goes whirling, passing on
The web of life slow changed from bronze to iron.

*ON THE FRONT OF A PYLON,
OCHRE AGAINST THE STONE,
THE ROYAL WIFE DINES
IN PROFILE WITH PHARAOH.
UNDER THE OBSIDIAN LINEN
THE LINES OF HER LIMBS
SLIDE VOLUPTUOUSLY
INTO HER LONG, POINTED SHOES.*

Minoan into Greek

Spin, Planet, spin! Bellows of the minotaur
Die away beneath the flames of daedal palaces.
Lions quiver beneath the arrows of Sargon.
Croesus beholds his image on a disc.
White marble spots the grey-green hills of Greece.
Charmed by the music of the Asian grasshopper,
Soothed by the wash of lights upon the sea-near hills,
Greeks become friendly with the Earth,
And forgetting fear,
Under the long shadows of the peristyles,
Speak of the beautiful importance of themselves.

*WORN BY THE RAIN OF AGES,
THE FAINT FAIR BODY OF THE BOY
BLOOMS IN THE IVORY-WEATHERED STONE.
HE STANDS BEFORE AN ALTAR,
WORTHY TO BE SHOWN THE GODS.
LIKE A DRAPERY OF MUSIC
THE GARMENTS OF HIS MOTHER
FLOW IN THE DELICIOUS MELODY
OF THE CHISELED BREEZE.*

Carthaginian

Who has heard the crack of Carthaginian whips
Upon the backs of frozen elephants,
The roar of war-horns in the Maritime Alps,
The snake-drums of Numidian cavalry?
Who has seen the Punic triremes walk the sea
Like water-spiders, to the yell of slaves?—
Or lamp-hung oxen charge the Apennines?
In vain, Great City by the sea!
Shot from the Roman catapult,
The head of Hasdrubal whizzes into the lap of
Hannibal.

“*Carthago . . . Delenda est Carthago! . . .*”

In vain the shrieks of babes in Moloch fires,
Or twisted engine ropes of women’s hair.
The eagle advances;
Flames spout from the rock-hewn windows
 of the elephant barracks;
Ships flare;
The ax of the proconsul leaps from its rods,—
And Carthage falls.

*ON THE GREEN SURFACE OF A BRONZE COIN
A GENIAL NUMIDIAN LION
SMILES HERALDICALLY BENEATH A PALM TREE.
HANNIBAL STRUCK HIM TO PAY HIS SOLDIERS.*

Roman

Now to the faint clink of swords
And wolfish snarling of the twisted tubas
Rome throws out white veins of roads to bleed the
world.

Over the castled wall in Britain
Pea-sized rocks are tossed to crush
The ant-men in the furze.

Eagles over S. P. Q. R. change to crosses over I. H. S.
Then, as the city-heart withdraws its blood,
Towns flare into the midnight sky,
The flames of villas taste the stars,
Moonlight floods the empty cups of amphitheatres;
Hun fire glitters in the Parthenon;
And silence settles upon the northern hemisphere.

*OVAL SCRIPT OF GIANTS
PUNCTUATED BY RUIN,
WORDS OF THE RUINED AQUEDUCT
MARCH IN THE LETTERS OF ARCHES
OVER THE PAGE OF CAMPAGNIA
INTO THE ALBAN HILLS.*

Asia Major and Minor

To and fro, to and fro, drift the wheeled houses
Of the city-haters upon the northern tundras.
Prayer wheels whir in the dark gorges of Thibet.
Leaning low upon the necks of their horses,
Men with pagoda-shaped hats
Gallop through shoals of whistling arrows
Along the hill-tossed ribbon of the Chinese wall.
Only where the sun glitters upon the domes of the
Bosphorus
And upon the red roofs of monasteries,
Islanded-minds contemplate the paradox
Of infinity in the womb of a woman,
Weaving a thin web of unity
To cover the glare of the bleak bones of chaos.

*THIS BACTRIAN BUDDHA
SMILES WITH THE MOUTH OF APOLLO,
HEARING THE BRITISH BUGLES
SHOUT FROM THE HINDU HILLS.
MEMORIES OF ALEXANDER
BLEND WITH THE MOMENT ENGLAND. . .
"OM MANI PADME HUM."*

Celts in the North

Harps flutter the lamps of Tara,
Chariots smoke along the plain of Conal,
Saint Brandan sails west of Lyonesse,
Tintagel beholds Iseult weep,
In May young Launcelot finds Guinevere.
Coracles of saints creep northward,
Churches stretch their arms across the landscape,
The grail comes to Glastonbury,
And Arthur hides himself in Avalons of song.
With bells and vellum books and croziers,
Hermits take refuge in Iceland.
There in the lava caverns
Loud with the grinding voice of ocean,
They light their small Judean candles
To the droning intonation of forbidden hymns,
Gazing fearfully at the red beard of Thor,
Wagged bloodily along the northern Earth-rim.
Follow these stepping stones of islands
Across the boreal ocean,
Northern splinters of Scotland,
Orkneys, Faroes, Shetland,
Beyond that—

Occidental

Westward the unsuspected continent sprawls heavily
across the face of the planet,
Changing the colors of its forest robe by seasons,
Flashing the white jewels of its lake-necklace.
Sliding forever from the sunset
The grey-green surface of the Earth-star
Hurtles its giant arch from west to east:
Serpent mounds unroll their "S" scars along the Ohio,
The stag-branched artery of rivers drains unhampered
to the gulf,
Smoke of grass fires drifts across the prairies,
Red-men follow clouds of buffalo with stone-tipped
arrows,
Cliff-men scamper up and down stone ladders,
Priests peer from the black mouths of *kivas* to salute
the sun,—the sun
That glittering upon the spines of the Rockies,
Watches the white crests darken eastward,
Beholds the slag slide down the sides of Shasta,
And leaves the land, —
To see his face disced in a trillion tangents
Following westward and westward across the waves of
the widest of oceans.

*YET UNDER THE BRANCHES RUNS THE INDIAN TRAIL,
EARTH BEATEN BY THE BUFFALO MOCCASINS—
EARTH REMEMBERING, TREMBLING IN THE MOON-
LIGHT.*

Stir of the Vikings

Ohoy! From Scandinavian fjords
Dragon ships dart forth to trouble the northern hemisphere.

The horn of Roland astonishes the literal eagles of
Roncesvalles.

Droning a new litany deprecating the Northmen,
Priests stand in arched doorways not yet become
pointed.

Golden-haired princesses in solid-wheeled carts
Drawn by chalk-white oxen jolt from hall to hall.
Stag horns whiten on the beam ends.

Paris shouts from the walls of its island as Vikings
row by.

The White Horse gallops upon the turf of Kent.
Priests cower in the fens of Ely.

Black ships lie like saurians upon the beach of Ireland.
Monasteries candle. Silence descends upon Tara.
Keening for the young men echoes in the valleys,
While hunted chieftains slay the last Irish elk
Among the bog fastnesses of the inland mountains.

Lyric Interlude of Hunters

Sliding from a lit world high in silver rainlands,
Glides a mournful river down a heather valley,
Making secret music to the reeking heights.
Dew is on the bracken, drenching web-hung spiders.
Mist will fall and coldly on the face turned upward
To behold that valley climbing into mountains
Terraced by the cloud-racks streaming from the
barrows,
Shimmering with sun-bolts haloed on the hills.

Hark! The voice of the river is broken!

Standing in the swift ford, titanic in the mist-light,
Loom the palm-spread antlers of a rutting elk.
Last of all his proud race, last of ancient monsters,
Hazel-eyed, musk-stinking, water cups and gurgles
Cooling to the pipe-veins of his huge-thewed limbs.
And his voice goes tolling through the heather foot-
hills,
Calling like the trumpet of a dying sun-god
Lost in dayless mountains on a darkened star.

But who are these sneaking through the black oaks?—

Golden-torqued, and hairy of the nose and armpit,
Coursing with their wolfhounds longer than the dawn-light,
Bounding in a great arc, swifter than a spear—
Whitely flash the jav'lins, darkly swish the arrows,
Till the black tossed antlers like a cloud at sunset
Redden in the storm-froth of the bloody ford.
Mounds of tearing wolfhounds yammer in the water
Like the fiend-dogs' welcome to the souls of hell.

Whips! Whips! Whips! Cut the shaggy throat!

There he lies, eyes glazing, with a red tongue lolling,
Branched and like a thunder-tree the lightning kills.
Blow you kilted chieftains, blow upon your bronze
horns,
Howl you brachs and wolfhounds, at the noise of
bugles,
Rolling like a coronach through the misty hills—
Blow, chiefs, blow! Swell your cheeks and blue veins,
For the past is conquered and the beasts are dead.

Names of the Northern Heroes

Listen to the names of the heroes
Who stepped from island to island,
Pausing awhile under the outstretched smoke of Mt.
Hekla

To build halls, to bathe in the hot springs,
Thence leaping into the snow drifts,
Begetting, murdering, bringing landslides
Upon the farms of their enemies,
Worshipping Christ or Thor, indifferent,
Ship-chested men, massive child-bearing women,
Singers of songs of conquest, love, and discovery,
Hating for generations,
Holders of parliaments upon volcanic islands.
Too long have you been forgotten,
Gardar, and Ingolf, and Gunnbiorn,
Erik the Red, and Karlsefni.
Utter me the Saga of Erik, founder of Greenland,
Builder of snug hall at Bratthild,
Plier in shield-hung ship to Blacksark,
Where ice pinnacles glitter under the borealis,
Silver foxes bark among the moon-wraithed cliffs,
White bears ride the sailing icebergs,
And cub-seals tumble in the rookeries.

Son of Erik, bringer of Christ to the northland,
Lover of witches and battles,
Tell of your salt-crusted oarsman,
Blundering on *skerries* to westward,
Tell us of Vinland the Good.

Forgotten Harvests

Darkness and silence of the Northland,
Too long have you held the secrets of our Fair-haired
fathers
Hidden like mysterious mountains in the twilight of
autumn.
But through the rune-shaped windows of old books
And the black mouths of ancient sagas
You are seen and heard again.
Poppies smoulder in your springtime snowbanks,
Ethereal green stripes your midge-haunted reindeer
pastures,
I see you reaping desperately in the short Greenland
summer,
Hear the bells of your cattle driven home at sunny
midnight,
Watch the cod drying on the driftwood racks,—
The sun-glow faint below the frozen hills,—
Till fingers of the aurora tamper with the moon
And white stars build the lasting arch of winter.

*SPRINGTIME AND HARVEST
ARE NOT OF MEN'S SETTING,
AUTUMN IS OFTEN A CENTURY FROM SPRING,
GO PLOW THE STRAIGHT FURROWS,
YOU HEROES AND MARTYRS,
PLUCK HANDS FROM THE SEED BAGS,
YOU SOWERS, — AND FLING.*

Lyric Interlude Terrestrial

Pause, Watcher in the High-skies, below the moon-track

Listen to the void-muffled voices of the planet:

Plaint of sibilant oceans, moan of the red-clouded
Sirocco

Muffling the lions' roar among the shifting Saharan
hills,

Drone of the monsoon through the palm fronds of coral
atolls,

Clatter of thunder among the white peaks of the Hindu
Kush,

Dying away with forked flashes over the sea of black
clouds

Stretching from the walls of the Himalayas to the
coast of Coramandel.

Thus age unto age the organ-song of the whirling
Earth-globe

Blends with the high notes of meteors screaming across
the upper air,

Playing fixedly the bass tone of the star unceasing,

Like the broken stop of an organ

Uttering itself alone to an empty cathedral.

Pause, Watcher in the High-skies,
A new note from the planet,
As if bell-wethers of gods fed through the star-pastures,
Comes the faint jangling of death-bells from the north-
ern hemisphere.

Death-bells from Jerusalem and Cyprus,
Tollings from campanilles,
Death-bells following pilgrims across the Alps,
Death-bells from Paris and London Town,
Moving with low, silver tolling
Out of the mouths of the steeples,
Telling the track of the plague
Into the paralyzed northland.

Darkness Prevails

Darkness to northward prevails;
Scarcely a ship goes to Iceland.
Only old Adam of Bremen,
Painting by lamp and at midnight
The face of the planet on vellum,
Writes of the lands to the westward.
Only where Iceland uplifts
The pall of the smoke of Mt. Hekla,
Streaking the midnight sun,
And surprising the north with wild flowers,
The secret was cherished by priests
Who tell of an oar washed from westward,
Carved with the rude runes of Greenland,
Showing the Fair-hairs still dwelt there.

But only the poets have heard
The click of the ice on bone-runners
As the sleds of the *Skraelings* dashed down
In the twilight of northern summer,
Overwhelming the church at Gardar
With an army of fur-swathéd hunters.
Only the poets have known
The crack of the whips, and the dogs' bark,

The shouts and the scurry of lights,
The flicker of swords 'round the houses,
The bleat and the shrieks of the women,
The dwindling "Ohoy" of the Northmen,
As the flames of the town die in starlight,
And silence for five hundred winters
Falls like a death-sheet on Greenland.

But what of the land to the west,
Drenched in the light of the future,
Whose secret was kept by the Northmen,
Waiting, outstretched and expectant,
The glimmering sails of Columbus?

NORTHERN EARTH MOOD

II

SAGA OF LEIF THE LUCKY

I

*Leif was a man's name.
Over the huge, bold shoulder of the world he came,
Into a land as lonesome as a star
That God had set aside
For mortals not to mar, —
Too huge for men, —
Not till Leif's sons set foot upon the moon
Will such a deed as his be done again.*

Leif Erikson came rowing up the Charles
In the sea-battered dragon-ships,
Stroked by the strong, blond carls,
The rattle of whose oars
Had wakened sea-lions on the glacial shores
Of Greenland, where the white Christ newly ruled.
Leif brought the old gods, too,
The grim, scarred northern crew.
Though Olaf had baptized Leif,
Grace irked him strangely
As rust upon a knife,
And he feared the hammer of Thor

And the voice of the Norns, —
He was by sea-winds schooled ;
Mystery and fighting his trade, —
And men had heard the braying of his horns
Above the boom and pother of the seas ;
Thorgunna, the Sorceress, heard them at the Hebrides,
And Icelandic fjords, and dwellers
In the low-eaved stone huts of Greenland villages,
Now roofless to the Arctic sky
And the cold's malice,
Five centuries staring up like a skull's eye
At the ghost dance of the borealis.
Leif steered southwest,
Watching the stars slip
Over the carved hair of the dragon's crest,
Until he drove on foggy coasts,
With great, flat rocks, porches to bleak plateaus,
Where crowding icebergs grind,
Next, a landfall of dark forests piled like thunderheads
Against long, frosty hills behind.
Then south,
Past inland-twinkling mountains
And a vast river mouth,
While vague voices bellowed at them from the sea.
In calms they heard the breathing whales ;
Strange fish leaped flapping on their decks ;
Spears winked in starlight
As they patched the ragged sails

Or polished shields with ballast sand,
Staggering up quivering mountains to the stars—
Staggering down—
Leaving a spuming wake,
Till a great tongue of land
Turned them west again
Into a river and a lake.
So Lief came rowing up the Charles,
He and his golden-bearded carls.

Others came after him,
Bringing Norwegian women
With gold-wire braided hair.
These men built dams and cut the *masur* wood,
Floating it down to Norumbega Town,
Where by stone quays
The long ships lay with folded sails,
That in the spring took wing,
Carrying the wart-wood and the skins
To Iceland, to Norway.
There craftsmen turned the wood to rune-carved bowls
And sold them to the king
Or to the priests,
And the berserks gulped from them
At the feasts,
“*Vas hael*”,
In frothing mead and ale.

All this was sung by skalds
In saga tunes,
And set down by Olaf's priests in runes,
And then forgot.
Plague fell on Greenland villages,
Breaking the last link in the chain,
Till the news died from lips of men
Through the dark years
And no ships came to Vinland coasts again.

2

Two hundred years—
Upon ten thousand miles of beaches
Never a sail dawned!
Never a glimmer or a shimmer!
The Redmen and the *Skraelings*
Kept the coasts,
With darkness in their brains,
Stealing up and down a little way
On useless evil errands
Like painted demon-ghosts;
The fire pots in their low canoes
Making a faint red glower in the sky.
So the long night eclipsed the day
While Leif's house mouldered away.

Can you not see the winter closing down
Year after year on Norumbega Town,
And never a ship,
While mothers hid the trembling lip
And told old stories to the dwindling brood
Of fair-hairs round the fires,
Tales of Norwegian fjords, where *dvergs*
Posturing against the northern lights,
Shouted at little villages
From the high snow-pastured *bergs*,
And *helgars* milked the cows at nights?
Scant grew the food.
They killed their last red cattle,
Whose bellowings no longer frightened
Skraelings now in battle.
In the fields rotted the harrows.
Ever from the forest flitted the stone-tipped arrows,
Till the old men slept in barrows.
And the youths followed old desires
Finding flat-nosed brides beside the *Skraeling* fires.
Stone axes took the place of steel;
Bears claws the teeth of seal;
Black hair the fair,
Till the last old woman died who used a chair,
Babbling in the lost Nordic tongue
Of Icelandic meadows,

And poppies of the midnight day,
Glorious upon Mount Hekla's slopes
When she was young.

*Moss on the thresholds,
Cold hearthstones,
White bones,
Trees in the houses,
Roots in the stones, —
Vinland the Good,
Oblivion's kiss,
No land has greater mystery than this.*

*Four hundred years
Leif slept;
Saturn kept spinning in his rings
And the ants crept.*

Then Columbus came to Iceland,—
Did he hear of Leif?
A casual name treasured in old tunes,
An old man's tale perhaps,
Rumors men passed along the docks,
Something priests read him from their runes?
By every rule he
Should have known
Iceland was Ultima Thule.
Here, however, was an ant who thought,—
Clever—
Watching the tides and flights of birds,
Putting the words of fools together.
“God locks his secrets in a box
Whose key is paradox”,
Thought *Maestro Cristoforo*.
“Therefore, it may be best
To go east by sailing west.”
So he sailed a hundred leagues beyond all thought
Into the western ocean,
Where Leif beckoned through the devil's weather.

Next act:
Eggs have stood on end;
The priests rage in vain;
The word "gold"
Tickles the ears of Spain;
Curtain upon an age. . . .

Sweep on, you caravels of hope,
"Niña" and "Pinta" and "Santa Maria,"
Shall it be said, son of Erik the Red,
You were not with them
Because you were dead?
What ribbed the valid heart
Of the great Admiral
To drive calmly on
Into the sunset
Away from the dawn?
Not all was reason; not all was maps,
But the old tales came back,
As he trod the deck at night,
Up and down, athwart, up and down—
The tale of Norumbega Town,
Lending a tonic courage to his hails
To the "Niña" and the "Pinta",
As they swept on forever westward
And westward with the following gales.

And Leif was there the night
That they saw the mysterious light;
There in the dawn and the calm
When they lay
Like tired birds from heaven.
Leif was the first on the shore,
When they fired the glad salvo
On San Salvador.

*How seldom do sowers
Go forth to the harvest,
Or hands wield the sickle,
That fling in the spring—
Yet Autumn remembers
Those dreamers of April,
Asleep on the hills
Where the harvesters sing.*

FUNERAL AT HIGH TIDE



FUNERAL AT HIGH TIDE

The Earth must breathe by hours!
In lungs of marshes she inhales the tide,
Alive, and deeply breathing in her sleep
Long draughts of heavy water from the sea,
Her arching chest fills slowly with the flood
Till spear-tops of flat grasses lie awash;
Shoals drown to shallow glimmers where the wind
Ripples like small rain-patches in a shower.
Islands and bays brim level,
And white houses stand
Inland upon the islands, low,
As if the water's crest
Rose higher than the banks.

Then comes a while of shimmering calm,
Earth's water-glutted dream,
A hot *siesta*, full of half-mirage
That lifts white dunes above the warping beach.
Long green reflections blend with yellow lights
Among reflected pines,
Black waters blister underneath the sun,
And far straight channels of the flooded marsh,

Like old canals of silted cities
Lined with palm trees, stretch
Bright avenues of molten lead
To the horizon's end, where water banks
Like oval liquid on a full cup's brim.

The Tide is coming in.

On such a rising tide in deep July
We lie a-fishing, in an awninged boat.
The sun is clanging on the molten bay
Like giant hammers on half-liquid metal,
Till the gas-blue vault above
Quivers and rings with heat.
Not for a second dare you catch his eye,
A dazzling furnace door
That opens on a fiery place
Behind the tile-wall of the light.
The white-hot tears run down the cheeks of day.
Fat Earth lies with her face up to the Sun,
Filling her lungs to the last water-breath,
While small waves trace on highest sand
A spiritual lace of broken kelp.
Time comes to rest,
And for a space—inflated—with her bosom arched,
And still as swollen death,
The huge world breathes no more.

It is high tide.

Now, while the world of insects hums
Against the faint despairing pipe of birds,
We set our lines.
The negro pilot sprawls along the thwart,
Eyes covered with a rag, brow-sweating from the sun.
The boys plunge in to swim, quick,
Darting like young seals—
And then slip out to drip
Like little Adams in the tangent heat
That thuds hot hands upon the cracking roof.
Inland we watch a funeral
Which crawls along the roads.
The dark heads slide like beads
Along the top of hedges to a whitewashed church
Whose five thin pillars lie,
Caught on the tin-white mirror of a cove,
In widened lines upon a flooded shoal,
Like quivering strings upon the bridge
Of drum-flat wire-strung instrument.
Look, in the churchyard wilderness beyond,
Where gray-white head-boards stray
Like sheep without a dog,
There yawns a yellow pit
That is the long procession's goal,
For there they gather in black patches

On the spattered sand,
As if the ants had found a thing to eat.

It is slack tide.

Just as the sullen water moils in flux,
Hanging between the in-come and the ebb,
Surges a voice in prayer
That strives to sweep the land and sea away.
We can not hear the words,
But rocking cadences intone
Across the wrinkled water,
Sinking to withered bass-chants of despair.
Then—like a letter filled with news of death
That comes as unexpected on a peaceful night
As winter thunder to these island homes—
The yapping keening cries of mourners fall,

“Oh God! Oh! Jee-sus!”

With a low sound of spades and thunder,
Marl on thudding wood, and nothing under—
Rolls the intolerable prayer—
Screams, barks, and singing pitched in high despair—
A long stillness follows, hot and sick. . . .

The tide has turned.

The Earth begins to breathe again.
And all the level floor of water slides

Backward and backward to the daylight moon,
With sighs from marshes, clucks from birds,
A cupping sound from hollow banks,
Where muddy bubbles plop their scummy lips,
And the unholy fiddlers sit in cavern doors
To brandish fists, whetting their claws for corpses
With Satanic glee, as if they knew
All living things are food, and all must die.

“Oh God! Oh! *Jee-sus!*”

Growing fainter now down swampy lanes—
The boys look at each other with uneasy smiles;
The pilot strips the rag-shade from his eyes
To see the cheerfulness of light.

The incantation of the prayer has ceased and yet—
“Oh! *Jee-sus!*”

Cry out for me you poor black mouths!
For we are brothers
On a spinning den of beasts.

I had a dream of beauty and the Earth,
But it is ebbing with the clutching tide.

This cockle-boat points toward the ocean now,
Out to the unplumbed ravin of the sea.

No! No! The Earth is not alive!

She does not breathe!

This water floor is pulled by sun
Or moon—as all of us are drawn,
Clutched in a nerveless, old untiring hand.
See what the boys catch on their ugly hooks!

Strange croaking fishes with utilitarian mouths,
Poor things Earth breeds behind mantillas of her
beauty.

The marshes crawl with headless things,
Dragons to break through priestly dreams
Like cries of fire at night.
And there one lad stands, laughing,
Poised like young Victory upon the prow
One instant—plunges in—and then is gone,
Dark waters over him—and bubbles. . . .
Is that all?

The tide is going out.

Let us return:

There will be comfort in the meal tonight,
In candle light,
And in the unsuspecting faces
'Round the tables at the childish games,
Checkers, and little colored disks
That move in blessed worlds of man-made certainties;
Peace, when the children's faces fall in sleep
Into prophetic masks of time-to-come,
When, like the night,
The silent answer of the darkness comes.
Come, let us weigh the anchor and go home.

CHILDREN OF EARTH



CHILDREN OF EARTH

"And I lifted up my eyes, and behold,
The mountains had a strife with the sea,
And I wept that man was between them."

I

The first thing that he saw or that he knew,
Outside himself, was pasture on a hill
That swept an orchard-arc into the sky,
A field with spurs of rock and tumbled walls
Of frost-tossed stones his ancestors had piled
To cairn and wall, and planted apple trees
The north had dwarfed and given dragon's eyes
And twisted hands strained southward by the wind.
Small huckleberries withered under these.
Down at the hill's foot sat the granite house
Rooted a deep half-story in the ground.
Its back was hidden snugly in the hill;
Its face looked valleywards with window-eyes
That stared past granite farmsteads to the hills
So bleak, so dark at dawn you might have heard
The last of all the Indians calling there.
But cow bells rang a mountain summer through;
The beeches whitened and the hemlocks sang;

The oats came in; fur thickened on the lynx—
Then, on a pyre of glory, autumn passed,
Burning to embers underneath the arch
Of winter where the dipper blazed, while winds
Whined through the dusty caverns of the snow.

John Kenyon grew up with it thirty years;
Paying one southern visit to the sea,
He got his wife there. Slim and oval-faced,
She made you think of sunsets when the east
Holds stars, but hint of islands in the west
With palms against the sun and one lone ship
Followed by screaming sea-gulls down the light.
He seemed a rock beside her, but they lived
Unlonesomely a lonely winter through
Until the first one came, a perfect child,
In everything but life. "I think its soul
Is lost among these hills", they heard her say,
"My strength went out to keep away the stones;"
She shut the granite sunlight from her eyes;
Tho' it was August, she complained of snow.
John hid the child. The doctor stayed awhile,
And smoked in hopes that John would do the same.
But calumet could never comfort him.
He sat there with his eyes far on the hills,
A two-day's beard upon his chalk-albed face
Like hemlock needles pricking through the snow.
And so they might have sat till neighbors came,

Had not a wind sprung up from dales below,
Rippling the trees like ruffled lakes it brought
The trouble to his face, a stifled fear
That leapt to frantic action when the pines,
The two tall pines, which stood beside his gate,
Planted perhaps when there were moose about,
Woke to a dreamful song of summer seas.

“Those trees!” he said, “those trees!” and got an ax.
The doctor followed. John was deeply staid,
And thought his maker worthy of respect,
But who could guess what trouble made him do?
He had a glint of murder in his eye.
And murder sure it was, for he walked out
And cut the big pine down with angry blows,
The other, too! After the first had crashed,—
Before his strokes fell on the second tree,—
There came a pause, and in the pause a voice
That cried, “No, no!” in protest from the room.
But up he flashed the blade that scared the wrens,
And drove the biting steel with such a force
The chips leaped from the gate into the door.
And every glittering circle with its blow
Brought from the inner room a quavering “No!”
“No, no, John!” Till the doctor left him there,
Working as if he wished to extirpate
The living root of evil from his life.

Far down the road he heard the second crash
And turned to see John staring in surprise,
Crouched with his ax between them, so, he seemed
A man, who having murdered in his sleep
Wakens to find his victims and despair.

As for the slaughtered pine trees, there they lay,
Like two strong lovers parted by a quarrel,
With careless, listless limbs that should have been
Mingled in whispered raptures all the night.

This murder of the trees the doctor felt
Was more than exercise to ease the heart.
"Why trees? Why both? Why not the old elm stump?
It seemed as if he struck from jealousy."
The doctor pondered it almost a year,
Tho' human births and deaths had tolled a score,
He thought of trees, and went again to John's.

The trees were gone, but fine-split cord wood lay
Piled for a high half-story 'gainst the house,
Ready to burn. Impatient of delay
John seemed, for even then a fire was lit,
Drawing the crackling June bugs to the hearth.
And every chip was raked up in the yard,
Like evidence of crime—all but the stumps—
The doctor thought of amputated arms,
Till John and she brought chairs out on the porch.

The talk went round of weather and the crops;
Till darkness made him feel it safe to say
"Those stumps down there, that glimmer in the moon,
Look like the monstrous white bones which they set
Beside the gates of whalers down the Cape."
This broke the ice, although he all but feared
The lake of fire that lay beneath the cold.
It led the thread to sailors and the sea,
And to her home, far south of them, a place
Where myrtles grew and palms, a land of sun
That made your heart beat quick with ample life
And warmth that rolled in from a summer sea,
"It's warmth! It's life!" she cried,
"They never will be born alive, I know,
Not here, there's something minus in these hills;
The stones crept through my eyes when he was mine."
(She pressed one hand beneath her empty heart
And pointed with the other at the hills
That looked a graveyard underneath the moon,)
"So when he came, why he was just like them."
John winced. "You see, she hates my hills," he said,
"Look, even now the sound of wind in pines—"
"Listen! she cried, and put her hand on his,
Like one who meets a friend in argument
That isn't quite so friendly as it seems—
"Listen", she said, and leaned across the rail:
Silence was there beneath a silent moon
That dappled stone-walled terraces a mile

Down to the valley where the pine woods lay.
It seemed as if they heard the long hushed voice
Of seas that rolled before the glaciers came;
Waves whispered to the hills of withered things;
There was a wash of waters in the air;
A white-cap tossed moon-metal in the pines;
Farm windows were the riding lights of ships.
They saw her lick her lips to taste the spray.

Before the Indian summer they were gone.
They said she whipped the horses down the lane,
With color in her cheeks; she had been pale.
John sat behind to watch some salvaged goods,
A model of a ship (she asked for that)
A clock, and all the lustered bric-a-brac.
John Kenyon watched these relics of his past,
And bade his friends good-bye beside the train,
A trouble in his eyes like some old hound
A thoughtless hunter drags a-field a day
Through unfamiliar woods when scent lies cold,
And snakes are in the grass. He watched his hills
Slide past the windows back into his past,
But out of sight was never out of mind.

II

A low, long coast: flat islands in a line
Of green against a blue, tremendous sky;
Soft buoy-bells tapping a slow mermaids' dirge,

Curving a welcome many miles to sea,
With white lights flashing pale in whiter day,
Beck'ning the ships home to an ancient town,
Past empty-windowed forts like toothless lions,
Past pillared houses, looking at the bay,
To berths among the cotton-shaggy wharves.
Beyond rose steeples and red tile of roofs
Where sunlight mated with October air,
October that was like a cool July.
But not the chanted songs of stevedores,
Or tenor clocks, whose voices shivered down
In ghostly silver through the narrow streets;
Not honeyed calls of black itinerants
Could sing him any deeper in his dream.
The always-rocking cradle held him yet,
The sway and rhythm of the ocean's breast,
A nurse that lulled his past into a dream.
He dreamed through streets; the loud planks of a
bridge
First roused him to himself again, and her.

They passed down island roads of stoneless sand
Clutching and silent to the wheels, by huts
Where strange trees drooped with swaying Spanish
moss
Like catafalques of giants, strange to him;
But shadows wore a silver mask for her.
She drank the drenching sunshine, and she said,

Laying her head against him, with a smile,
"John, I am happy here, for this is home."
"Your home," he said, before he checked himself,
"Of course," he added, shaking off his dream
With self-reproach; he found a happiness
In hers, altho' he saw behind his eyes
A light through birchen leaves so cold and real
It seemed to give this other-world the lie.
"But let that be," he thought, and held her close.

Yet he was not prepared for evening pools
Enameled by the sunset, turgid scents,
And long, white, wraithy herons gliding home—
The moon that rose behind the cypress swamps
Went glimm'ring like old lanthorns past a gate.
And moved him from himself as moonlight will.

At last they turned beneath a live-oak tent,
So high he only knew they lost the stars,
More like a Hindu temple than a road,
The foreheads of the leaf-clumps fronted brows,
Along its aisle like carven elephants,
And dangled trunks of mosses grey as stone.
Dim house lamps made an altar down its nave
Where lights went flitting as if *nauch*-girls danced.
Flat arches seemed to flap with votive rags
In phosphorescent cave-light, patches lay
Quilted like daylight tucked along the dark,

Outside the long fields glimmered, roosters crowed,
And like a train among the distant hills,
That always passes but is never gone,
Beyond far island dunes they heard the sea.

Lights in the door-yard! Voices! Clam'ring dogs!
A welcome half hysterical from blacks,
"Do Gawd! da missy is cum hum again"—
They brought her eggs and red-eyed chickens tied
Head downward, softly chortling in despair—
The whole black hive hummed welcoming its queen.
"And I the drone?" he thought, "No! No!"—
He tried to heat his genealogy
To meet the warmth of all that moved about,
But only froze the colder when he saw
His wife with arms around her old black nurse.
Out on the porch he went and looked away
Across the marshes to the fronded dunes;
The moon-arch swept above him pale with stars,
A level wind flowed easily from the sea;
A kind of atavism in his eyes
Swept the horizon 'round from isle to isle
And in the flatness missed the thing it sought,
Until soft voices called him in to dine.

The drone-thought was the urge that drove him on.
The first year:—white-washed fences, a new barn
And shell-filled roads; the cotton failed, but then

He made that up in cabbages and yams.
He drove the negroes hard, but paid them more,
And often told himself that they were men.
All this they wondered at, yet liked because
They always had been Sons of Ham before,
Taken for granted with a lordly air
Of "fetch me this," or "fetch me that," which came
With Lords Proprietors, and stays on, too,
For reasons not debatable in words.

His neighbors pondered, but they liked the man,
Refraining out of ancient courtesy,
Remonstrance at his fissure in a scheme
Worked out by generations patiently,
A quiet, Bible-fostered-Janus plan
That works where things, once planted, often grow.
Sometimes with pipes a talk of John went round,
"But let him be," a sturdy ancient said,
He has forgotten niggers and the sun;
And I have often seen his like before!
I'll give him seven years, or there abouts . . ."
Meanwhile he prospered, two years in the sun,
The sun that beat from June until November.
Straight down it looked and gained upon itself;
The land breeze withered seaward till the night
Put coolness in the hands of little pines
That stretched their arms forever toward the bay;
The green floors of the marshes rolled away,

Bird-haunted and tide-visited. All day
The caravels of clouds stood out to sea,
White fleets that blazed sheet lightnings, as young night
Threw rippled darkness on their moon-tinged sails,
When wasps stop sealing nursery-tombs with clay—
All day—all day—
The tides streamed greyly past his hill-sick eyes,
Monotonous as rivers in a dream.

Monotony of levels clutched his brain,
Tho' the plantation grew, and children came,
“How can it be,” he thought, “this place which wears
A terror to my eyes could give them life
Through hers, when hills and living-talk of streams
Uttered a word of death beside her heart?”
“It can't be true!” he said, “It happens so!”
Only the spring brought comfort to his eyes,
A living green like his lost mountain laurels
And cool magnolia blossoms overhead,
Azaleas burning in the mosses like
Volcanic flames in ashes. On a floor
Of sand with long, brown needles of clean pine,
Along the shadowed vista of the house,
The negroes sat and wove sweet basket-grass,
The nurses of his children, talking low.

Five years he toiled to keep the fences up,
Boll-weevils from the fields, a hopeless task.

He wondered how it was that all things grew,
But what he planted, pushing planks aside
And fences, how he longed for boulder stones,
The hills, and cold sterility of snow!
Each summer now was harder, and each fall
He had less spirit left to drive himself.
Not that he felt ill, no, he still was strong,
And brown, and massive, but somehow he slept
In his own room a hall down from his wife.
Perhaps the sun? Tho' since the children came
She did not seem to want him as she had.
And he was glad to save himself—himself—
Always himself,—herself! It got to be
A house of tolerance where servant Love
Was only boarded for convenience sake,
A picture on the wall nobody saw
But strangers,—so familiar it became,—
The children were the nail on which it hung.

“You work too hard,” one day she said to him
“Why, we could live on half a crop a year,
And yet you plant and wear yourself away
To fretfulness—for what?” She did not see
He missed the driving women of his race,
Or that full fields were symbol of his power,
An index of his will that every night
Drove him to resolutions which the sun
Dwindled to little actions. On the porch

He sat and smoked more often ; told the hands
What work to do, and if a roof fell in,
Or roads went bad, they stayed so for a week—
Or for a month. This hurt him but he blamed
His troubles on the blacks. He felt that they
Were not so grateful as they might have been
For easements he had made in other days
When energy made gifts an easy thing.
But now his heart would cash past favors in.
It maddened him to find his fences down,
But they stayed down unless he built them up,
Or saw that darkies did it—harder still—
And they were quick to see the change in him
Five years away from mountains ; he was tired,
“Less acres,” said his wife, you’re getting thin.”
“Less acres? No!” For he must stand alone.
The struggle lay between him and the sun,
And so he plowed by night and by himself:

Black walls of trees against the waning moon,
Chattered with eery night birds, and the owls
Slid on their level vanes across the night.
Now one, now two, the orange squares of light
Went out and left the moon on roofs ; the pines
Droned in the sea-wind fresh with subtle scents
Of marshy beaches. When he turned the team,
Beside a darkened cabin, he could hear
The sigh of sleepers and a baby’s cry,

The rustle of palmettoes, click of palms—
The horses settled with long-taken breath
Against the strap, the share cut deep, and they
Were off, along the furrows curved like waves.
The sandy earth curled out to either side
Fleeing the silver rostrum of the plow ;
The horses hips stalked ghostly on before,
While overhead leaped high the vault of night,
Cloudless, with dusty stars, a witches stir
Of darkness and the platinum of the moon.

It seemed he could not tire on nights like these ;
Field after field rolled waves before his plow ;
He went home younger, hungry for his wife,
For what she was—or had been. And he hoped,
And lay beside her, till he found, one night,
The flame that once had warmed them had gone out.
It came to him as suddenly as death,
But she was calmer, having known it long,
Resolved to face it out in pillow-talk—
When little things the world knows little of
Are said at night that make or mar a man—
She spoke of near things as they really are,
Something a man is frightened by at home—
Meanwhile he strove to light the fire again
To warm his hands at least, if not his heart,
Blowing upon cold ashes of the past,
“Come back with me,” he pleaded, “to my hills,

For I am dying here, turned soft inside
By sun and sea—this level land of yours!
I did as much for you when I came down,
Leaving the mountains for the children's sake."

"It was for them," she said, "Now they are born,
And that which brought them here has passed away,
Let us be honest with ourselves. You know
We did not have that self-consuming love,
The long, cold passion that can burn life out,
The fire within the flint that waits on blows.
We loved the place where we could be ourselves,
Our special earth. Your peace will be at last
A grave in hills, mine sleeping by the sea."

"The children, though," he said, "the girl! the boy!"
And strove to wake her to himself through them.
She lay awhile and gazed into the dusk;
It seemed her words came to him from no lips,
That gloom had grown in darkness, when she said,
"We each must take the child that we love best,
And well I know the choice that there will be.
Come let us choose them now, while it is dark!"

Night hid them both. Outside the children's room
A dark magnolia filtered in the moon
That splashed white pools upon the counterpane.
A foxhound lay beside the young boy's bed;
That rose with bristling crest at first to see
The two white figures glide into the room—

The moon was on its fangs. John Kenyon stood
Beside the bed and looked upon his son;
He felt his wife had almost ceased to breathe;
She dropped his hand; the dog lay down again;
He turned and took his daughter in his arms.
"She is like me," he thought, "the boy like her;
He loves the sea, but she will grow up pale,
Unless I give her winters in the hills."
"Mother," the boy said, whispering in his sleep,
As if he felt she leaned across him there,
Lending her mortal yearning to his dream,
Then unhandfasted they both left the room—
Outside they wept. "I told you, John," she said,
"We loved ourselves, and did we not both choose
The child that is our own?" And it was so.

Thus after seven years, John Kenyon came
Back to his granite hills and granite house,
Bringing a pale girl with him who soon grew
Into a berry-cheeked but prim young maid,
Having an arm curved like the sculptured snow.
Summers, the boy came, staying till the frost,
And then went back to mother and the sun.
The neighbors talked—but they could never know
What letters passed between the sea and hills,
Or why John Kenyon let his pine trees grow.

THE NEST OF MIST

THE NEST OF MIST

A Mood of Mystery

I

Is it a womb of dreams,
That nest of mist? I hear
The little hymns of toads,
Sung to the quiet Mother of wild things
While tombstone-light
Whitens old bones of roads;
And pagan trees at prayer,
Backs to the moon,
Worship the silver stir of light
Which hides some boon,
New, in the lap of her to-night.
A hunt of nimbus-thoughts
With dogs of mist,
Dim riders-of-the-haze
Blow by, in Phrygian caps
Moon-kissed, while crickets cry—
Spume to the drowsiest wind,
They scatter over
Hills with a gleam
Like thinned quicksilver-steam
In phantom clover.

*How Earth's mystery
transcends both
thought and matter.*

All night Earth will draw back to her
This barmy cover,
Trying to make some mystery of life
With the young moon above her,
Drawing it back
As if she would rescind
A hill-top marriage
With the naked wind.

Blind eyes, dead ears,
Can you have lost
The mystery of Earth?
Blind eyes, to-night,
That lake of mist
Subtle with quickening light!
The Earth has teemed
Unto the ancient moon
With spirit-birth.
Dead ears,—how deaf
With little chat of man,—
Have you heard once
Since you and I began,
The old, old language of the sea,
Or the tormented winds,
Those tongues of mystery,
That speak in tones
Beyond all thought
To link us with the stones?

Dead ears and eyes,
By thought and matter sickened,
To-night by mist you have been quickened.

II

Thought, rootless thought of town,
Cut from its primal source,
Grows subtle and grows faint,
Less than the wisdom of the clown,—
Who with his hands in roots
Has felt them and himself,—
While sheltered from all weather,
The hives breed insect-taint,
Worship Leviathan and Mirth,
Hating the necessary drones
Of thought, they swarm together,
Pouring a cataract of birth
Till the great germens groan
With plethora of Earth;
Till fury cancels the absurd
Hope of the dreamers who'd transcend
By magic toxins from the herd
Our lone beginning and our lonelier end.

*How the lack of
Earth's mystery
affects the thought of
cities.*

Towns, the “immortal night” is gone,
The sanctity of sunset,

And the hope of dawn,
The irony of stars;
So many are your walls,
Your air breeds prison-hints
Of closed-despair that mars
Anticipation of our palls.

Your wildering tomes on shelves
Make us forget
That we are children of the Earth,
Who brings all things to birth,
And lends us breath,
And the relief of death
To free us from ourselves.

III

Earth's life is in her fields
Whose beauty quickened by the sun
Is not a city wall; but yields
To change, by chemistry of sunlight
On the face of leaves. Leaves are
A bridge between the ground and mouths,
Green alchemists that quicken all the star,—
Drawing from flesh of stones
Soft sustenance for flesh of bones.
Sunlight upon the face of leaves

How the living matter of fields feeds thought on mystery in contrast to the dead matter of cities.

Gives life to all material things;
Moonlight, that ghost of sun,
Must wield a subtler influence
On tree and field, until they yield
Manna for earthly spirits that exist
Frailer than air or mist,—
Hounds bay them nights, and even we
Can feel in moonlight mystery
The quiet souls of earthly things.

Town walls are slaughtered trees;
The forest's leafy wall alive,
In it our thoughts may thrive
On food the moon makes out of matter,
Even as all Earth-spirits do.
Ah! We should cease to shudder
At milk warm from the udder,
And light again the saucer lamps
Before the Earthlings' shrines
As our forefathers used to do
Before we petrified their camps.

Then living matter would feed thought
With moon-made food in open spaces,
Till the very babes we got
On bracken beds in ferny places,
Could see spirits like the hounds,

And the moulds of stellar things
Would recast their limbs like wings,
Straightening out the last ape-traces,
And the words of trees deny
Every lie that marred their faces.

THE FIRE THIEF

THE FIRE THIEF

A MOOD OF THE YOUNG EARTH

There was a runeless-time when Earth was young,
When all her valleys wore a newer green,
With light along the ridges of the hills
Like brass along the edge of leaves in Spring.
The days had longer, cooler mornings then ;
The gods had smitten dragons from the hills,
And quenched the mountain tops,
And taken fire away, jealous of man,
Who dwelt in one soft valley near the sea.
But all about him titan-spirits ranged ;
The centaurs called at evening on the heights
To goat-men and the daughters-of-the-trees.
In caverns lay the giants, hairy, huge,
Hiding from lightnings, but at peace with man.
The shepherds found them sleeping, through their
hands
The saplings grew ; the owls built in their beards ;
Slim unicorns drank from the pale-blue springs,
Which issued from their sides, for thus Earth drew
The strength back to herself that once she gave.

Next to a waterfall that sang a tone
Of joy within a valley, happy throat
Of all the joys of Earth in that far time,
There lived a youth cast in an Antean mould,
Of lustier limbs, and wider deeper eyes,
With fiery glints among his ample locks,
Who was the son of giants and of man.
For hid behind the fall there lay a cave,
Where arcs of color shifted when the sun
Shot pencils through the vapors, while the steam
And mist rose like an incense made of light.
This cavern was sacred to the sun;
One virgin served there lovely but alone,
Until a giant came, in scorched despair,
Fleeing the blatant stroke of vengeful thunder.
To him she brought the peach, melocotoon,
With cream set seven times in minted cups,
And from her heat and his huge loins the boy
Was born with love for man and hate of gods.
Laughing, he played with pebbles in the sun,
Or watched the opal-raindrop's molten fire,
Or his huge father's long and massive arms
Clasping the sleeping mother to his breast.
The sun's disc glimmered through the waterfall;
The spiders stretched their webs along the ferns;
The organ waters rolled a voice of peace,
Till stars looked through the window of the stream.

This youth first loved the sun and envied stars,
And sat upon the sun-struck heights in thought.
Dear was the valley with its wether-flocks,
Where cloudy sheep cropped in a sky of ferns—
Nibbling the bushes round like hour-glasses—
And he loved happy bathers and the pools,
Where heated noons he watched the leaping boys,
Ruddy as birchbark toward the tree, and white,
Flash like young otters to the startled fish
That fled among the wimpled lights of stones,
While chimes of laughter rippled with the streams,
And he stood silvered with a water-film,
Perfect as light, so bright the yellow rays
Came stealing down the aisles of forest arches,
Thrusting ecstatic fingers through the pines.
These things he loved. Yet water chilled his blood.
The streams ran down; he climbed with discontent.
Let the young shepherds sing with liquid tongues
A molten catch to match the river's voice!
Let the shy, naked girls stand white, amazed,
Where cascades of dark vines leaped down to them,
Holding the purple-amber of the grapes
While smiles died in the zaffer of their eyes
To see him leaping upward to the heights!
Not even grape-stained lips have kisses cool
As mountain snows! And there are rosier hues
On ice that kindles from reflected fire.
Therefore, he left the apple-breasted girls,

And honey-pots, the shepherds and their flocks,
And treading down the grapes he clambered higher.

No mountains frowned him down; higher he climbed
Than ever knife-hoofed centaurs dared to try,
Past the short trees, until the Earth grew wide,
The folded plains, cloud-troubled loomed below,
With winding of glass rivers to the sea,
Scarped woodlands, and the oval eyes of ponds,
While down the crystal scope of silent miles
He saw the wind-waves of the lake of air
Break with a long white surf in poplar trees—
Then turned and clambered higher.
The eagles skimmed along the blades of cliffs,
With snow wraiths swirling under liltless wings
That cast no shadow in the yawn of depths.
The hollow voices of the doubtful winds
Began to prophesy from dreary caves,
But no fear clotted blood that boiled in veins,
Pumped by a giant heart which longed for fire.
Not the green light from glaciers, not the sound
Of ice-encumbered rivers made him cold,
Higher he climbed, up to the mountains' horns;
Through rifts of evening light he trod, until
He strode out on the vault of sky itself,
Clutching with avid hands the sunset fire.

Slowly the Earth rolled eastward, easily,
Taking the valley with her like a face
That looks upon us from an evening dream
And blends with blue forgetfulness of sleep.
He found himself alone with bitter stars,
And with the bitten remnant of the moon,
Dwindling a fungous light or horrid green,
And looking sadly inward at herself.
He saw the arc of Earth against the sky,
Bite through the stars with jagged mountain-teeth,
But felt no fear. "The Earth is dark," he thought
"Tomorrow it may have the gift of fire;
Light will not be unless we brave the gods!
And who except myself durst snare the sun,
Or lay ethereal ambush mid the stars,
To snatch the glory from his streaming hair
And learn the secret of the morning? Oh!
I shall strike a fatal gash in night!
This flaming golden-thing that I would steal
Will breed eternal radiance from itself
Till there is no more darkness left below."

And then he shouted to the frosty stars
And leaped among them till their silver dust
Caught in his cloak and hair. And then he chased
Pale moths in misty gardens of the moon—
He watched the old sky-hunter lead his hounds
Across the zenith in a leash of fire,

And peeped about the diamond-sandalled feet
Of her who sits in Cassiopeia's Chair—
Those cloud-cooled feet an aeon high,—
The stars burn dark upon her light-edged robe!
And then he came beside the milky streams
Where seven sisters with the eldest blind,
Weave on their starry looms the primal silk
Spun by the star-fed dragons of the sky.
And then he climbed the silent, moonlit stairs
That give upon the windless dome of heaven,
And watched red Algol wink his demon eye,
Till like a man, he tired of stars, and slept.

The reveille that roused Prometheus
Was what the moon heard in the elder days,
Before all-haggering time had wrung from her
The sad eternal "O" she utters now,
The eager song of Earth before the dawn;
Long moaning of the trees before the winds
Of morning, and the canyoned panther's shriek,
The stealthy serpent-whispers of the sea
That laps this island-world with sib'lant noise,
Lowing of cattle, jargoning of birds,
The scream of stallions which salute the dawn—
All life-renewing sounds of coming light
Rose like a cry of welcome through the winds
That whistling, scour heaven—till he woke.

Almost too late to stop the sun
he vaulted down the cloudy flights
that lead from purple terraces.
Over the Earth's rim lashed the whips
of dawn like serpents in a fire.
The brazen cry of light the Sun
makes to his horses smote the hills
with crimson echoes; thunder of
intolerable wheels of iron
rolled like a storm behind the sea.
Up sprang the six white horses with
their flaming manes of light, the drum
of twenty-four bronze hoofs roared—then—
The glowing car was on him, with
time glimmering through its spokes. He saw
volcano-nostriled horses; felt
the ruddy searing eyes upon
his own like blinding irons, while
the Sun looked down in fierce surprise
to see him clutch hot bridles: leap—and miss—
And reel among the horses' sparkling hoofs,
Battered by lightnings,
Buffeted by thunder,—
The blistering car passed over him,
Its floor white with the sandals of the Sun,
And the loud rims rolled by, but yet,
One spark he caught and clutched its agony

With scorching hand that withered as he fell
Driven like one seared leaf down autumn skies.

Unheeded as an autumn leaf he fell,—
Till as a rich gem cutter from his hoard
Misses a chip of ruby for its glow,
The Sun missed from his heat the stolen spark.
And then the solar-voice, space-echoed, cried
A “stop-thief” to the daemons of the spheres;
The genii swarmed gigantic through the stars,
Treading with scaly feet the zodiac,
While spirits fled across the milky-way;
And like the wash of waves through bleaching trees,
The Sun’s voice inundated all the Earth.
The pygmies’ zither-music ceased to play
Amid ape-haunted Mountains of the Moon;
The firedrake paused within his crater-bath;
The gold-eyed sea-hawks leaped into the sky.
Gorgon and demi-gorgon from the caves
Twisted like whorl of condors up the air
With harpies, streaming on metallic wings
That clashed like shattered cymbals after war,
While underneath the mewing sphinxes ran
To see the spiral flock of wingéd things
That mounted to prevent Prometheus.

And now he dropped like the relinquished prey
Of ospreys eagles pirate in the sky,

Raked by cruel combing talons, by the beaks
Of bats with scissor mouths, while all about
The buffeting of wings was like the beat
Of waves that rolled him down a jagged beach,
That hurled him down a gantlet of despair
And snatched him through the level lanes of space
Toward the expectant rock where buzzards drooped,
Oblivious to the flanks of Earth that shook
With subterranean spirits dragging chains.
But as they passed the dwelling-vale of man,
Above its cup the haggard titan there
Cast from his falcon-troubled hand the fire;
And prayed Old Fate to blow upon the spark;
And journeyed to his god-invented bed.

That twilight trembling shepherds on the slopes
Of man's dark valley saw a falling star.
And then a sudden smoke burst from a wood,
And with the night a growing orange glow
Beat on low clouds and lured the curious,
Who warmed themselves, and then the timid came.
Thus man found fire, and learned to breed it new,
And feed its hunger on the flesh of trees. . . .
But even then, old men around the hearth
Would laugh and chuckle grimly at the tale
Of one who lost himself among the stars.
Holding their withered hands out to the blaze,
They mocked at such desire, "Better" they thought,

“Better the valley with its girls and grapes,
And this warm fire! Prometheus is dead.”

Not even now do ancients dare to think
Why buzzards slant across Caucasian skies;
Nor would they stop that everlasting feast,
Who love old chains—let the young Titan lie.

OTHER POEMS

POEMS OF THE SEA

SOUTHWARD SIDONIAN HANNO

Southward Sidonian Hanno lashed his slaves
Farther than mortal barks had dared before,
Around a sphinx-shaped cape that looked at stars,—
Then north they labored at the salty oar.

Northward and westward, till they saw at morn
A peak that vaulted upward into light,
Catching the crescent moon upon its horn,
An ivory tusk set in the jaw of night.

Under the stars a dream was born in mist,
While clouds streamed from the nipples of low hills,
Leaving the slopes below pale amethyst,
Veined with the silver lightning of the rills.

High as the peak itself, a lark began,
And each as in a shell could faintly hear
The voice of ocean from a far-off beach,
Whisper its hoary secret at his ear.

Behind the line of water upward smote
The petaled tangents of the rising sun,
Till straight from boat to sun, from sun to boat,
The liquid glory of his face had run.

And in the gardens underneath the keel
They saw the orange spiders on the corals,
Fiddling a demon music to the reel
Of gold-eyed serpents in vermillion quarrels.

The scent of woods rolled to them from the land,
While conjured at the oars they listless lay,
Mixed with a whiff of cresses from the cliff
And upland orchards redolent of May.

Each thought that he alone beheld the dream,
Fearful that if he spoke it would be gone,
Until a thousand mast-lengths overhead
The sunrise leaped from lawn to gilded lawn.

Then with a throaty “ha” at every stroke
They walked the leaking ship toward the strand,
Making her weedy prow break into smoke
That drifted like an incense to the land.

Yet never might they find a place to beach;
At noon they beat their shields, but mocking hails
Blent with a god-like laughter out of reach,
Answered the friendly wafture of their sails.

It seemed a land where mortals had no part,
Red, ringed about with granite-teeth and foam,
With fiery-glinted pastures where Melcart
Or Baal with all his sons might be at home.

So, till the sun plunged into molten brass,
When horns of inland cities hailed the moon ;
Down cliffs, all night, across a sea of glass,
Toppled the talking timbrel's toneless tune.

And from the ooz the dead-faced krakens came
To peer with lidless eyes into the ship,
Or dive beneath through clouds of milky flame,
In arctic-light that streamed from fin and lip.

Until the quaking crew began to fret,
And murmur, saying one had left his sire,
And one his wife and babe,—so Hanno set
His bow into the Bear and steered for Tyre.

Glad were his bearded men ; with steady stroke
They sank the peak below the ocean-stream,
And afterwards of many lands they spoke,
But always of the island as a dream.

THE SEA-GIRLS

When I was a boy, the tides filled
A sunstruck, saline cove each day,
A pool like a cup of life.

High stood a ruined tower there, empty,
Save of memories that returned
To moan by moonlight.

But at warm noon it lived again
With the sun through windows,
Waking haunted gloom,

And in that dusk we would undress,
Till our white bodies bloomed
Like lotus in the mist—

And then leap out! The vacant door
Gaped forth the virulent young-joy
Of boyish limbs.

We flashed ecstatic to the frothing sea;
We scissored in smooth foam,
With hearts in tingling breasts—

We laughed. We plunged, until we felt
The hands of sea-girls on us
Like a dream—

Cool arms that clung about our necks,
And oval mouths of water on our own
That warmed the fire

Within ourselves—fin-footed Phrynies
Of the cobalt depths, like fishes
To the hips, and water-smooth.

Once they came out and lay with us
Upon the sands along, drying
Their sea-green hair.

They sought us like the wind in clothes.
What joy had we two then
To look upon each other

Deep in brother ecstasy, our first,
And know that we should both
Get babes to swim the sea.

THE WANDERER

It lies amid an agony of dunes,
Upon a cape
Beyond the reach
Of grief,

Shaken, when giant's feet march down the beach
To tidal drums beat on the barrier reef—
A haggard grave with sand-worn runes
That blur,
Blur to a ghostly shape,
The name of some forgotten mariner,
And then, as if the carver had been brief,
“Was born,” they state,
“And died—” no date—
“He was a wanderer.”

His ribald cross leans drunken to the storm;
 The shifting sands
 Disclose
 Pathetic hands;
The freezing winds shroud
 Or unclose
 The withered form.
The wind keens through the grass
 That's sparse as old men's hair,
 With voice as thin
 As overtones upon a violin,
 Until white bones
That once played jail-bars to his heart
 Lie bare.

And in the frozen blast dwarf-peas
Flaunt like a pack of motleys
'Round the spot,
Rattling the hard dry pellets in their pods
Athwart the thunder of the seas,
At first I thought,
"Be still, you little fools."
And let him lie at ease;
This is some sorry jest of God's!
Some grim sidereal jape
At the dull triumph of material things,
Trying to tease
The dead moon's face to a sardonic gape
At bones that longed for wings,"

Then with weird spectacles I saw,
Clothed in the watery shadows of the wind,
 A form was there,
A spectral shimmer in the emptyness
 Of hazy-greyness thinned
 From light, less
 Than a mould of hollow air.
Was it some lover's ghost come back to earth
 To whisper the loved name
 Now but a blur?
 No!
All at once I understood the peas' dry mirth!
 This was his soul
 That had no place to go—
 “He was a wanderer.”

LOW TIDE

There never was on Earth a time like this,
When all the eager souls of men were sad,
Always there was some idol's foot to kiss
Or sovereign's hand—now all the gods are bad—
And kings have lost their heads and crowns of gold,
And from the tombs of books the solemn wraiths
Stalk in the twilight like a story told
At bedtime to the children—these were faiths.
Listen! Along the coasts of all the world
Even the sound of ebb-tide has been stilled;
Columbus' and Magellan's sails are furled;
And hopeless mouths explain the hope they killed,—
While apes grow tired of being their own god,
Blink at the stars, and lie down in the sod.

Move forward changing Earth in your eclipse
About the dying star we call the Sun
Out of the shadow of our soul's eclipse;
Not all your ebb and flow of tides is done.
Man has turned inward, feeding on himself,
And found himself a brother to the beast;
The ebb-tide has exposed his lowest shelf,
And now the West returns unto the East.
And we may hear the tide returning soon,
See tangents of the sunrise on the hills,
And shadows shrinking backward to a noon
When slaves shall look above the reek of mills
To read the future in the stars at last—
The Earth is but a record of the past.

THE SEA HORSE

I

Kept as a secret by the plains of sea
There was an island bright with tropic noon,
Where lived a priest of hallowed family
Who served a dying goddess of the moon.
There was no other left but only he
To set the honey cakes within her grot,
And see her silver smile, poor water-slaves,
The fishermen about, had long forgot
It is the moon alone that rules the waves.
For the gods warred upon each other,
Plaguing the vexéd Earth until she ailed,
Wreaking odd vengeance on their servants men,
And for a while the ocean gods prevailed,
And all the servants of the moon had died,
All but the priest and his dwarf brother,
Who near her argent idol would abide
In holy thicket where the phoenix cried,—
A damascened grove that grew in an elipse
With crescent shadows in the half-eclipse,
When moon and sun met muttering with bloody lips,
Repeating an old spell that ruled the sea,—
Until moon passed sun with her tilted face,—

A spell the priest learned from her in that place,
Where musically a cavern-fountain drips
Over the moon's cold idol frozenly.
These spells had saved the priest
But not his brother,
Whom the sea gods blasted at his birth,
Working upon him in his mother
With a bad yeast of insane mirth,
So that she died and he was born,—
As though a vine-pod held a withered pea,—
With a gnome's body dwarfed and weak;
Only his head was beautiful to see.
He had two voices; one came from his head,
Clear as a bird's and smooth as honeyed-oil,
The other from his body seemed to steal
Complaining like a prisoner on the wheel,
So when he talked it seemed a ring-dove crooned,
Then, suddenly, the body-voice would squeal!
And so his brother loved and hated him.
Sometimes he spurned him from his way
Like silent, gulping toads he found,
The strange sweat of the fecund ground,
Hiding from light within the moongrot dim,—
But tossed him oaten cakes at night,
Which the poor dwarf in silence swallowed,
Moving, as the long shadows of the palm trees turned,
To cure his body in the silver light.
It was the moon he followed.

And all the while his brother loved his face,
Pale as the moon upon the sea at dawn,
Yet swore there must be no more of his race,
Fearing his body, so the time went on.

There was sly traffic up that valley of the moon,
For fisher maidens came
Whose fathers were the servants of sea gods,
Praying the Crescent goddess for a boon.
And the priest gave them fruit of the grove-pods,
That made them avid for his care.
At night he met them on the rocky stair,
Where moon-flowers blow, but close by day,
And there was much to do and naught to say.
(But spirits, the moon sent him for the night
Returned with other kindred through the day,
And these the priest was forced to place in wolves,
For in no other bodies would they stay,
Until he had an ever growing pack
That howled beyond the grove and grew more strong,
Trembling before his eyes; behind his back
Their teeth snapped like the echo of old wrong.)
More wolves, less maids . . . but for one girl
Who loved the moon for better and for worse.
Yet by her came the sea gods curse.
For the dwarf loved her, too,

And knowing he must win her by his face,
He hid his body in a weed-grown pool,
And waited in the lotus buds to woo,
Until the girl fetched water from the place.
He stood so still the little grass-snake drank;
Between the lily leaves the spider skipped,
And when the moon was high she came and dipped
Her cruse into the pool until it sank
Making a gurgle cool. She saw his head
With golden-bearded chin; she shrieked and fled,
Remembering the tales of shepherd lads,
While the smooth voice came up to her from lily pads,
Pleading like something dead.
But afterwhile she came again,—she must—
For the cool words with which the dwarf besought her
Seemed but the midnight-music of the stream
Mixed with the moonlight of the flowered-water.
And the long murmur won her trust;
The hot summer was upon her and she must
Just lean to kiss his lips as in a dream—
Into the pool she slips—
Fainting with love and starlight and the night,
Ah, the smooth joy of crescent hips!
She let his small hands range,
And loved him better than the priest,
For in the love of dwarfs is something strange.

But this the wolves told to the waiting priest;
They lolled their tongues out in a scarlet glee;
And he came running to the lotus pond,
Where all the pack came after him to see.
He found them in love's mystery in the pool,
The dwarf all tangled in her shroud of hair;
And made them pupils in a horrid school.
Even the wolves must stare.
This was the last night that the dwarf lived;
His brother bore him to the seas;
The wolves ran with him, eyes like dripping lamps
Along the ridges dim; down through the valley-damps,
While quiet stars looked down between the trees.
Such was his journey to the cliff,
And much shrill pleading in the double voice
Scared the young shepherds grey,
But neither strength nor mercy gave him choice,
And he was dead upon the beach at day.
Three times his brother cast him out to sea;
Three several times the water brought him back,
Thrusting him forth as if it were defiled,
And there he lay as still as still could be.

*BUT THE MOON AROSE BY DAY
AND SPOKE PALE WORDS UNTO THE SEA,
THAT FELL LIKE ASHES FROM HER THIN LIP'S GREY,
UNTIL THE SEA BEGAN TO SWOON,
LOOKING UPON THE GOLD CHEEKS OF THE MOON,
TILL WITH A WRINKLED MOUTH
SHE PUT HER WHITE TEETH FORTH
AND DRANK THE DWARF.*

II

The dead are gathered in the sea by demon hands,
The dead that stream to her from many lands;
The finned-gods of the dim, green places
Are skilled to read the story in their faces,
Are curious of all drowned men have done
In upper air beneath the moon and sun.
Some they give rest to under fluted shells
Upon the shifting lights of submerged beaches
That no sound reaches,
But the long tolling of the sunken bells,—
Not so the dwarf:
The moon forbade that they should thrust him forth,
So he came visiting the water-hells,
A careless rider down the moon-sick tides,
Driving sea-children from their ancient places
With the most beautiful of all dead faces,
Until they swore new vengeance on the priest,
Unleashed the Storm's own beast,
And made a treaty with the wind and sand
To drive the moon-priest from the safety of the land.

Certain it is the island changed its weather,
The wind and sand fell on the crops together,
Snatching at every leaf that lifts;
The flocks grew less; the women brought no gifts,—
Hunted by his own wolves, in sore distress,

The priest shifted for his living to the sea,
And the gods down in the water laughed with glee,
Sending him strange meat, jellies no man dare eat,
Fishes from which he cut the poison glands,
Afraid to look upon their egg-white eyes
And fins like little feet.

Then one day as he fished,
He saw the sun upon his right,
Then on his left, now on his right again :
The water flattened in,
Making a breathing sound, the sea turned round and
round.

The whorl of water drank into a cave,
And then began to spin
With racing crests upon its metal rim,
That made him rave to see them wave at him.
Down, down the spinning flume
There sucked a whistling wind ;
He saw the bottom ooz, a green light on it.
White curds of spume upon it lay,
With fishes belly-up, and red things at their play,—
Then from the gulf there came an organ neigh !

Up the long funnel raced a sea horse,
Whinnying through the spray,
The Storm's own beast,
With dilate scarlet nostrils and bronze hoofs,

Through the mad working of the ocean-yeast
He saw the bulging shoulder muscles play;
Its scalloped mane
Waved like black lightnings in his haggard brain.
Then the sea shut its oval mouth,
And the horse snorted at the sun,
Stamping in foam as if he trod a tun,
While the priest dug up the water with his oar,
Scudding with screaming gulls back for the shore,
And the horse followed with a clang.
Loud thwacked his hoofs,
And once the whole sea rang;
There was a smothered clash
When the broad breast met the flange of waves
With sullen crash,
With long smooth strides the horse tore
Over the molten levels of the tides.
But the priest reached the shore.
Yet late!
The horse was on him, trampling the boat
With rendings as of ice in arctic winters—
Off float the cedar splinters.
But the wolves met him on the beach,
Rushing the horse in waves.
Now up and down the strand the wild fight raves,
With roaring wolves and screaming neigh,
Thunder of hoofs,
While the sea bellows in its hollow caves.

The echoes woke and spoke
A gibberish like braying of hell's asses;
Over the sand an eagle's shadow passes.
The green-breasted bull gods of the sea
Rose from the waves, roaring with glee,
The horse's ripped flanks flapped like rags.
Twelve wolves are down, trampled to quivering bags.
And the last leaps for his throat,
Fierce as a mother stoat.
Loud drums the thud of kicks,
Now dull, now thick, sound sick . . .
There burst a song of hoofs along the strand—
The priest is down upon the sand . . .
Tossed to the stallion's neck,
A black arch, white with many a mad foam-fleck;
Now with a pacing motion
He whirls the screaming priest into the ocean.

*But the moon arose by day
And spoke in metal words unto the sea,
That fell like ashes from her pale lip's grey,
Until the sea began to swoon
Under the silver nostrils of the moon,
And with a shaggy hand
She set the drowned priest back upon the land.*

POEMS OF THE OTHER WORLD

SHADOW TO SHADOW

If it would walk at all,

This was the very night.

I leaned out of the window while the moon
Threw down the tunneled walk a shadow-pall
Of black magnolia shade; I heard the tune
A wind sang by the ivy-mantled wall.

The west was dark but for a wisp of light,
And yet no night-birds had begun to call—
If it would walk at all, this was the night.

The quiet street lay dim beyond the gate,
And quietly its bars
Slid past each other like a gliding grate
Of ribs across the stars.

Yet, not a sound, no reassuring click
Of metal latch, and not a bird would scold,
Only the swirling darkness growing thick,
And I more cold.

The whirling darkness folded in to drape
And shroud the shape of Nothing till it stood
With bone-white moonbeams glimmering in its cape,
With shadows for a hood.

And well I knew that if it spoke my name
How they would find me by the window there;
I guessed the grisly angle of the jaw,
The teeth below no nostrils, and the stare.

But not a whisper froze the waiting shadows;
No voice was added to the choir of care,
Until I croaked into a world of silence,
"How are they, over there?"

Then, like the last priest of a vanished nation,
The Shadow drew the cowl about its head,
And with a web-like hand made salutation,
And went back to the Dead.

SPIDER, SPIDER

In her tower
Sits the woman
Who is haunted.
Strangely dimly
Burns the light there.
She must shield it
With her body
From the night wind
Off the moor.

*Sanity tending
the lamp of reason,
is approached in
her haunted tower
by the spider of
madness.*

It is high there
In the tower;
And the woman
Has ceased spinning.
She is listening
To the footfalls
On a stairway
Never there.

When the wind blows
It is lonely,
It is lonesome,
It is lonely;
When the wind lulls
It is lonely;
And the dead live
On the moor.

In the silence
Of the night time,
Through the darkness,
Come the wolf-howls
From the forest,
And the lost birds
Crying strangely,
And the witches
Riding dragons
To the sea.

In the tower,
Squats a spider.
In a corner,
Like a black pot
How it dangles!
How it dangles!
Like a fat pot
On iron angles,
Hairy-lipped,
A crab from hades,
Full of glee.

Is it sleeping?
Is it sleeping?
Stealthily,
It is creeping
One, two, three-four—
One, two, three-four—
One-two-three.
When the light fails,
In the darkness
It can see.

Light is failing.
It is failing.
It is out!
Shriek-shriek-shriek.
What is wailing?
Pretty baby,
Pretty baby,
At her heart,
Spider baby
At her breast there
In the dark.

BLACK ROSES

“For he on honey dew hath fed
And drunk the milk of Paradise.”

His hard-horn eyes
Glitter with pictures
Of the cloud-piled skies;
Wide eyes that little limn
Heaven, unseen by him;
Beside the river road to hell
The dream slave lies.

*Here where the swart demons go,
Pass and repass to and fro,
Tread very soft—speak low.*

Shrill are the dog-voiced winds
And shrill,
Straining through cedars
At the mouth of hell,
An eyeless socket in the hill;
And the dark river slips,
Sucked through red granite lips,
Into low moonless halls
Down to a cavern land it falls;

Spills with black, lightless thunder,
Where darkness crouches on the dragon hills
An earth-mile under.

Backward, flung back upon the humid winds
Stumbles the mile-deep thunder;
Out of the earth is born
As haggard as a shout from solitude,
The damped copper-clamor of a horn.
Near here no farmer plants the kindly corn!
Only the sodden dreamer hears the sound
Of the infernal horns' bray underground,
While fitfully comes,
Rumbled like trundled drums,
The river's voice,
The mile-deep thunder—
Speak very soft, speak low;
This is a place of wonder!

Tread very soft—tread slow—

For here black roses grow
In ground unholy,
Flowers of darkness
That have sought the light,
One blue-leafed seedling
From the world below
Of night and shapeless trees and voiceless birds,

Of vast, dim meadows and of monstrous herds—
Petals of midnight which are come
To prophecy against the sun,
With seed pods dangerous to all things bright,
Dull blossoms from the tree of melancholy.

Lean very low—lean low

To hear from dreamer's lips
How fiendishly appears
A webb-foot being at the mouth of hell
To prune the ebon rose with leaden shears;
And how that demon strews
Jet petals round the dreamer once, and twice
Cupped like the sloughed scales of an asp,
And bears the dreamer's soul down cavern roads,
Cold, in a damp-smooth clasp.

*He bears the dreamer's soul asleep;
He bears the swarthy roses deep—*

Deep down the pounding cataracts,
Along the river hurled
Through leafless tracts
Within a starless world,
Into a city drowned
With shadows drooping down
From balconies of blindness
In the murky town.

Signals of flapping blackness float
In folds of darkness from the walls,
And a gigantic watchman rests
His bony hands upon a drum,
Waiting for sunrise that will never come;
The eyeless serpents rustle in the moat;
And silence calls.

*Then where the dead waters flow
Down to the last pit below*

There is a noise of boulder stones,
Cast up by blurting fountains;
Washed down the cataracts with grumbling tones,
That rumble dismally among the subterranean moun-
tains.
And down the crags
Along whose face
The grey clouds hang
Like rags in space—
The cowled dreams sit
And listen to the thunder, thunder, thunder
Of the black river and the stones.

Tread very soft—speak low

This is a place of wonder.

THE TOWER OF GENGHIS KHAN

It stands upon a plain in far Cathay,
A tower like a needle with its eye
Through which the desert sun strikes once a day
At noontide when the mountain shadows die.

Eastward the plain swoops downward and away,
Folding about the towers of U-ban,
Where herds of yaks and fleece-clad Tartars stray
Along Mongolian marches of the Khan.

Ever the Earth turns eastward toward the night,
Dragging the tower with it till you spy
The dragon watchfires of the Heavenly Wall
Tingeing the Chinese sky.

Night pales to day; and day burns into noon,
Till once again the sun darts through the eye
At midday when the watchman sounds a tune
On yak's horn, like a dying eagle's cry.

Age after age that lonely horn has told
The noons of endless centuries that pass
Slower than granite turning into mould,
Long as the tower's shadow on the grass.

Only a story lingers in U-ban
Of once, how in the pride of crazy-power,
They saw one scarlet sunset Genghis Khan
Climb to the very top of that same tower

And toward the East his snowwhite mantle fling;
Sunward the bloody signal of his vest,—
So arrows whistling like a wild duck's wing
Fell on the startled cities of the West.

ARABIA FELIX

Arabia Felix is its lovely name,
A sound wherewith to woo,
Where the spent traveler came,
Farther than Khatmandu
It lay, deep in the shifting sands,
In the hot heart of wind-worn hills
Among the desert lands.

There was the lake,
The grove of tamarisks,
And the sole tree
The nesting Phoenix knew,
Thither came merchants down from Tartary
And bearded men from far off Xanadu,
Knowing the road about the mountain-steep,
Where the old Sea-Murg lived among the trees,
And the White Thirty Birds beloved of God,
Which no man sees.

No man can come there,
Save he know
The river road through thunder-smitten passes,
Where the small caravans can go,

Led by the little road-wise, belled she-asses,
Bearing seed-pearls and sesam winnowed fine,
Henna and hashish for the dancing girls,
And turquoise-matrix from the Soldan's mine,
And sweet palm wine.

There is a story told, how long ago,
A traveler found it in the desert hills,
Wandering half mad with thirst till he drank sand,
Then suddenly he heard the sound of rills,
And saw green grass,
And valley land,
Where living waters ran,
And there the city stood beside its lake,
And the grim warders let him pass,
For pity's sake,
Into the town as fine as Ispahan.

Now he can talk of nothing but that place;
He must be daft,
On desert nights beside the dried-dung fires,
When dreams of youth come back and old desires,
But no one yet has laughed,
For only truth is spoken by his race,
And he can talk of nothing but that place
And of a girl there with a houri's face.

"It is beloved by heaven," so he says,
"It's stars burn nearer to the earth,
And low-voiced merchants chaffer in its cool bazaars
Amid sane mirth—
It is the domed town of the heat mirage,
Close to the heart of God,
Where dwells Laladj."

GARGANTUANA

Gargantuan ranges of blue-dappled hills
Roll down titanic coasts of cobalt shires,
While inland dreams a sunstruck city's ghost,
Streaked with the level scarfs from temple fires.
Down, down the hills a bull-voiced waterfall
Plunges from cloudy cliffs that climb so high,
It echoes like an organ from a hall
Of stairs that wind into the windy sky.
And there are monstrous footprints in the sand
That twist up rusty roadways red as snakes
Onto an upland paved with level floors
Of copper water stagnant in iron lakes.
And hooded peaks vault into clouded wonder
From whence the island's voice rolls out to sea,
Reverberating words of blatant thunder,
Dull as a demon's glee.
Its hills sequester meadows walled with fire,
On which like evil prayers the sphinxes lie,
With flame-like plumes that bloom upon their wings,
While red clouds wither by—
The roc has made his nest among the cliffs,
And in the evening from a mountain's dome,
Remote as thought, there blurs the sound of drums
That call the giants home.

REFUGE

To E. R. A.

Whichever way you turn, it lies
Just off the road.
You pass a house that scowls
Against a piebald hill athwart the sky,
Then a lane plunges down
With rootlaced banks,—
A row of apple trees,—
And that's the gate there
By the twin rocks in the field.
You never would suspect the stream
Had cut so deep, those tree tops
Might be bushes, but look out!

Between the twin rocks
Where the wicket stands,
That is the last place
You can see the upper world—
The dust still hangs along the road like smoke—
A sound of quarreling voices from the house—
And then, you push the wicket in.

It seems as if the hands of vines
That clutch the hidden gate
Let go reluctantly.
A little wind soughs down the rocky cleft,
Lifting the leaves,
Did someone pass?

Step down, step lower down,
It is not music here,
It is the thought of streams
Come through the trees,
The sigh of resting rivers
That are tired.
That pause to rest
Within the hidden vale
Amid the dappled granite
Old as time.
Yet it is melody,
Yes, it is music there
Beside the island's shore
That splits the river
In the mirror-pool.
It lies for all the world
An anchored ship
Rigged with white birches,
With a rocky prow.
See how the water parts
To either side!

Surely, if ever Peace
Has found a place
To hide herself
From noisy men away,
It must be here,
Deep in this cleft,
Where waters spread
To show a mountain
Its own lovely face,
Cool with the green of glaciers.
Who would guess
There is a hopeless village
On the heights,
Lost in the madness
Of the upper world?
But here, Oh, here!
Is refuge—
Come with me.

Slip off the body
Like a bather's clothes,
And plunge into the cooling stream—
Three strokes and you are there—
A little silver beach,
And shivering birches,
Where the ground
Is tiny-starred with blue forgetmenots;
She sits amid the shadow of the trees,

Hark to the liquid harp!
Only her death-taught hands
Could draw such music
From the shadow-wires;
Hers is the balm
And this the Gilead of souls.

POEMS OF PASSING DAYS

WHIM ALLEY

Whim Alley once led into Danger Court
Loud with the raucous talk of cockatoos,
Where bearded Jews a-squat in alcove shops
Sat waiting like royal falcons in a mews.
Softly as rain the vowed Portuguese
Fell from their red-ripe lips with eastern news
Of galleons whose names were melodies—
Softly—between the shrieks of cockatoos.
Who cared for royal navigation laws
In Danger Court—for what the Soldan said—
Or papal lines between the east and west?
Abram out-Shylocked Isaac with applause,
And clutched the sweated doubloons to his chest,
Whose late lamented owners were scarce dead.
For there were smugglers' bargains to be made
Where leaping arches looped along the walls,
While sunlight smouldered down the long arcade
And dizzened into flame on Spanish shawls.
And what the sequin brought in Louis d'or
Was news,—and rumors passed from Trebizond,
While Rachel clinked brass anklets in a door

With a straight glimpse of blue sea just beyond.
Dark sailors passed with tang of wine and tar,
And merchants with wide hats and wider fringes,
And two black Sambos smoked the same cigar
Upon a chest with three locks and five hinges.
Vanished in air! Those arches roof a cow,
To parrots' rings the frowsy hens resort;
Whim Alley leads to less than nothing now,
For only shadows dwell in Danger Court.

WALLS

The wall of his environment,
Altho' Chinese was not so high
He could not see tiled roofs of kings
Like dragon-backs against the sky.
And so spurred on by discontent,
An eagle pen that lent him wings
Transported him across the wall
To tea in gardens with the Mings.

Thus staged, his long but static fall
Made drama for ancestral ghosts,
Whose proud transgressions raised the wall
Of ego, which with echoed boasts
Had in past epochs starved their souls
With windy oats of self-applause,
Till they had met great grandpas
Twit-tittering on the seething coals.

DEAD MEN

To a Metaphysician

If they were shadows walking to and fro
Upon a screen you call reality,
Then, when the light fails, where do shadows go?
Are they the shades of shade called memory?
Yet if they really occupied three-square
And now are only shadows on a screen,
How can the light still cast a shadow there
From shades of shadows that have never been?

Such questions are a mimic pantomime
Of ghosts to utter nothings in dream chairs,
Myopia squinting in a mist of time,
An eye that sees the eye with which it stares.
Your light can only throw the ancient stigma
Of questions solved by posing an enigma.

OLD MEADOWS

How much we have forgotten that we knew!
The warmth of udders, and the cool of dew,
The flow of darkness when the sun goes down—
We have forgotten meadows in the town—
The sign of beasts, the easy lilt of wings;
We miss the miracle of usual things.

Once we were one with daily mysteries,
Trusting the arms in which our life began;
Earth in the cloudy nursery of high hills
Unswathed her mountain breasts to infant man,
But now her meadows' calm beatitudes
Are stifled by the city's platitudes,
And we forget Earth's hills, her ocean faces,
And the austere-grotesquery of desert places.

Yet, it is true, beneath the city's robe
The desecrated pastures dream of stars
That still behold from quiet places
The ocean-staring, sun-bathed globe
Slip through the nether spaces.
In the night interludes, when streets are solitudes,
They sleep and wait, dreaming of Ilium's fate,
And of the grass that time will reinstate.

Old fields bear epochs patiently, but men
Cannot abide till towns grow trees again,
And so they ravish Beauty for their joy,
And bring her home as Helen came to Troy.
A prisoner to the chisel or the pen.
But in the town she walks a stolen bride,
And only plays at marriage with the throng;
She lives in thrall, and gazes homesick from the city
wall,
While Earth's wild genius fights against the wrong.

Long cataracts of streets make us forget
That underneath the stones are ancient fields
Which whisper to the feet of Beauty yet
A longing for the grass until she yields.
And even while we claim her gratitude
For building her a house in which to die,
She seeks green solitude,
Where shepherds pipe in an eternal mood,
And daffs the mad world by.

THE END

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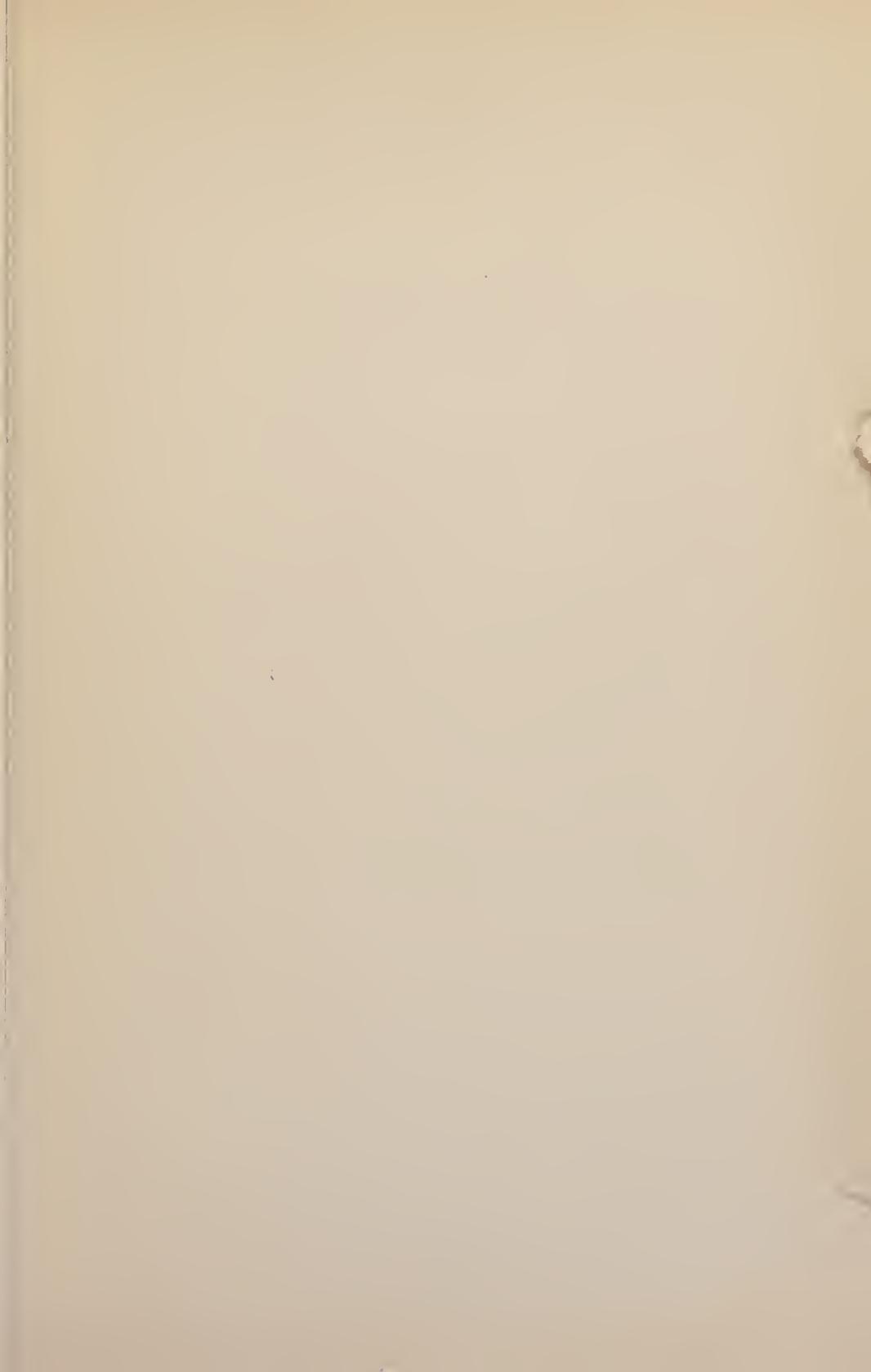
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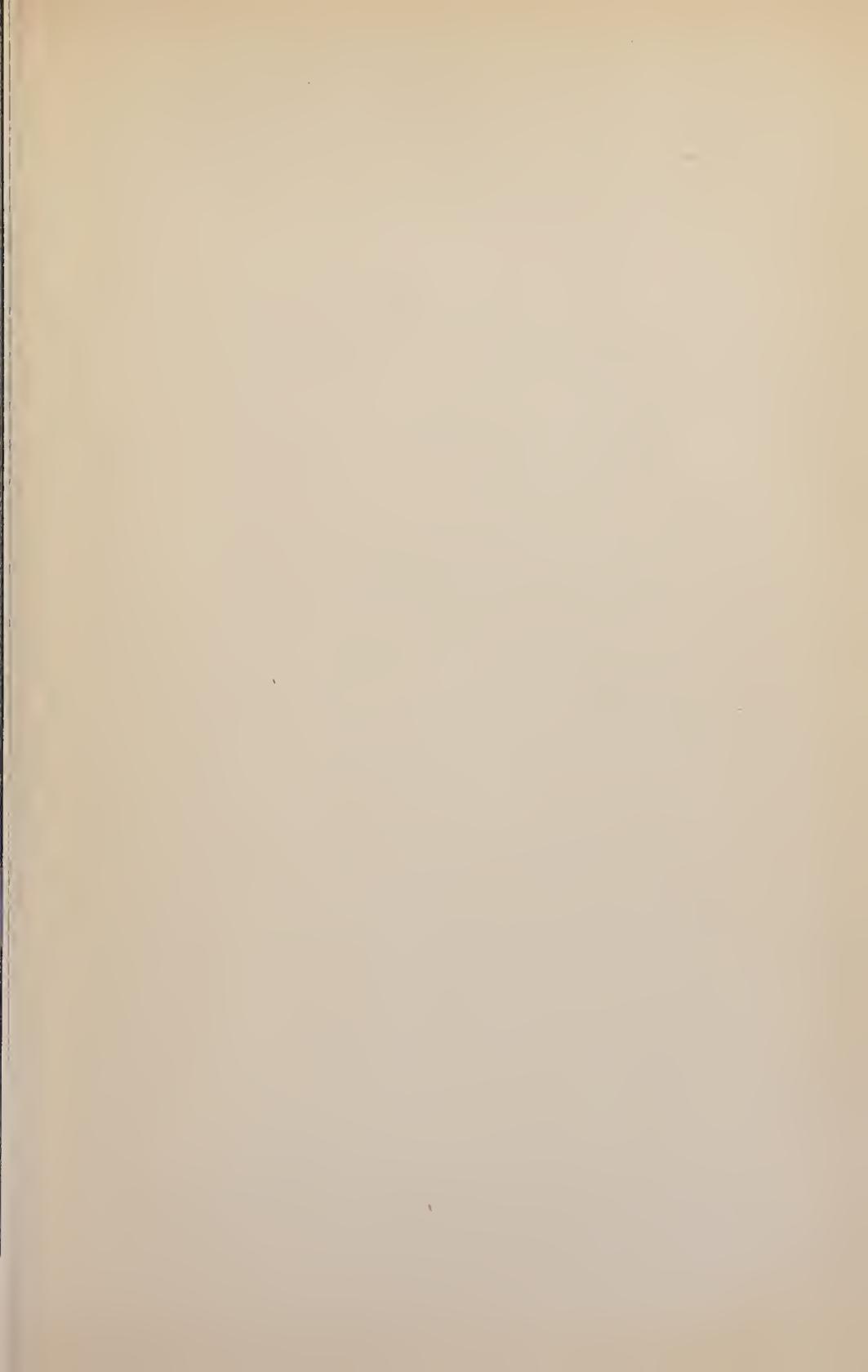


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